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BRIEFER COMMUNICATIONS.

THE FARMERS' MOVEMENT.

The widespread movement among the farmers to-day is their effort to adapt themselves and their occupation to the ever-changing environment, so that they shall be once more masters of the situation, receiving their due share of the product of American industry and exerting their due influence in the formation and development of national character. As a result of his industry the farmer has made food and the raw material of our factories produced from the soil more and more plenty, of better quality and cheaper. Here we find an efficient cause of his pecuniary embarrassment; the supply of agricultural products has been increased beyond the demand, with the consequent fall of price. If the surplus of agricultural products was matched by a corresponding surplus of gold, of personal services, of means of transportation, and of the comforts, conveniences and luxuries of life, such universal plenty would enrich all, beggaring none. But with over-production in agriculture, and monopolies of coal, of telephones, of electric railroads and of other essentials of modern civilization, the farmer finds himself at a great disadvantage.

Farmers have been content in the past to confine their labors to the production of wealth, leaving to others the control of those conditions which determine the distribution of this wealth. At last, however, they have awakened to the fact that the problems of distribution have not been successfully solved. They believe that they get too little for the product of their labor and others too much, that they must bear heavy burdens of society while they are at the same time practically debarred from the enjoyment of the advantages of the progressive culture of modern life. When in this discussion we speak of the farmer, it must be born in mind that we refer to the average farmer, who tills on his own account his own or another's farm. We do not refer to those who derive a large share of their income from other sources than their farms, nor do we mean the farmer of exceptional ability or those whose opportunities have been remarkably fortunate. An investigation, carried on for a number of years, upon different lines, based upon statistics official and unofficial, as well as upon other reliable sources of information, shows that the average farmer, east and west, north and south,

receives a lower remuneration for manual labor and for labor of superintendence than the average man in any other of the great classes of bread-winners, much less than those, who have not carefully considered the matter will think possible.

Because of this comparative decadence the farmer has for years demanded equal taxation, in order that the farmer's thousand dollars invested in his farm shall bear no more burdens than the thousand dollars of other men. But the statesman has confessed that he has not been able to remedy the evils of unjust taxation. He even acknowledges that they are growing worse.

The farmer has been content to refer questions of finance to the banker. Every autumn the farmers of America have hundreds of millions of dollars worth of crops which makes a demand for millions of currency. The supply of money at that season is inadequate to meet the demand. Hence, the price of crops falls relatively and the price of money advances. Year after year the farmer has been forced to sell in a glutted market and buy in times of scarcity. He demands a system of finance that shall make the supply of money at all times equal to the demand. He wants an elastic currency that shall do the money work of the nation with justice to both buyer and seller, to both creditor and debtor. But the bankers appear to confess that they cannot produce a medium of exchange and a standard of deferred payment that is capable of meeting the exigencies.

The farmer demands cheap transportation *between the farm and the market*; and he is met with the reply that the rates from the elevator of the middleman to the ship of the foreigner were never before so low as now, but this proves of little benefit to the farmer. When the farmer insists that modern masters of transportation might devise a system of cheap transportation from the country station to the city, he is told that the intricacies of the modern railroad system are too great and it cannot be done; to attempt it would bankrupt the roads. Moreover, when the farmers themselves, or their friends, organize an electric railroad to carry themselves and their freight at reasonable prices from the farmhouse to the city, the great railroad corporations oppose them at every point, going even to the extent of waging open war against the selectmen of the country town who lawfully attempt to lay the rails of the electric road across the track of the steam railroad.

The farmer turns to the politician and asks of him that his party shall champion the cause of the farmer and see to it that the government guarantee to the agricultural classes their rights and promote their interests equally with those of other citizens. But the farmer finds the politician more abundant in promises than prolific in efficient action.

Finally, the farmer has, in his emergency, turned to the scholar and asked of him a fair statement of the problem and a clear solution, based upon historic and economic grounds. But the scholar has been too preoccupied and prejudiced to give the question that painstaking investigation and careful and impartial decision which alone can make his answer of much practical value to the hard-pressed agriculturist.

Thus has experience taught the farmer that the solution of the problem of the future of American agriculture and of the American agriculturist depends upon himself. The farmers' movement is simply the awakening of these sturdy citizens from engrossment in manual labor and the struggle after material wealth, to a sense of their duty first to themselves and then to society. Such a movement may have obstacles, it may be slow, it may do much apparent damage, but it is irresistible, and in the end its results will prove to be of value. It has reached the stage where guidance, rather than ridicule and denunciation, is needed.

The innumerable details of the movement may be classified under organization, education, co-operation, political action.

I. Organizations of farmers are now many and strong, constantly increasing in numbers, usefulness and power. The Massachusetts Board of Agriculture devotes fifteen pages of its report for 1892 to a directory of the agricultural organizations of the State. In other States organization is carried to as great, or to a greater extent. Besides these there are many national bodies. At the St. Louis Conference, year before last, twelve or more distinct national organizations of farmers were represented, whose aggregate membership numbered hundreds of thousands.

Of the many national bodies several are worthy of especial mention. The twelfth annual session of the National Farmers' Congress, composed of delegates from each State, appointed by the Governor thereof, was held November, 1892, at Lincoln, Neb. This body is non-partisan, deliberative and advisory in its action, and exerts its influence upon the formation and direction of public opinion. It has created a National Board of Agriculture with headquarters at Washington, whose duty shall be to study the general agricultural interests of the whole country and see to it that no conflicting legislation shall injure the industries of any State. Two hundred members, from the majority of the States, attend the annual sessions, paying their own expenses. They represent the more wealthy and better educated agriculturists.

The National Grange, the oldest and most conservative of the distinctively agrarian organizations, held its twenty-seventh annual

session last year. Its membership numbers many thousands, its finances are sound, its organization is stable, its work is becoming more and more extended and valuable. Having experienced the flood and ebb of the tide which accompanies reform movements, it is content to advance with the even stream of national development, intent upon exerting its power at the opportune moment and place to secure the best effect.

Beginning in the South, but extending through the North, under the leadership of the late President L. L. Polk, the National Farmers' Alliance has been an aggressive power. This union of the farmers of the South with the farmers of the North, ignoring sectional lines and old causes of division, is one marked characteristic of this new phase of the agrarian movement. It illustrates and proves that the farmers of America have at last learned the value and the method of permanent organization. They have moreover shown a disposition to join forces with organizations of artisans and other citizens, whenever such union proves itself desirable.

Another organization of great value to the farmers' movement is the Association of American Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations. It has a full corps of officers and an executive committee. It is composed of delegates from each of the fifty-seven agricultural schools and colleges and of the fifty-three experiment stations of the United States. The association, therefore, represents the fifteen hundred members of the faculty and corps of workers connected with these institutions and also the many thousands of students and alumni of these colleges, a large number of whom are farmers or intimately connected with and dependent upon the agricultural classes. While this association is a scientific body, it is at the same time interested in the success of the farmer, and exerts a powerful influence upon Legislatures and Congress, so far as the educational or economic relations of agriculture and agriculturists are involved.

The farmers' movement is not then to be measured by the action of any one organization, but can only be properly understood when the resultant of many separate and varying forces is accurately determined.

II. In their endeavor to secure organization the farmers soon discovered the necessity of broadening their education, especially in the field of economics and politics. Hence, every farmers' organization has this object pre-eminently in view. These associations are themselves efficient schools, giving to their faithful members training in public speaking, in writing, in reading, in thinking and in administration. As a result of twenty-six years of this work the Grange has become a national university, employing hundreds of teachers, college educated as well as self-taught, who stimulate thought and lend inspiration to

their fellows. Recently it was "resolved that the Worthy Lecturer of the National Grange be instructed to continue the distribution of subjects for discussion to Subordinate Granges, and that questions of political economy be given prominence, such as those relating to gold, silver, greenbacks, national banks, corporations, interstate and trans-continental transportation, and the tariff, as it relates to agriculture." A similar work is carried on in the Alliance, which has prepared for its local branches a system of weekly lessons in political science. Ballads and songs have been multiplied, as a method of propagating and fixing new ideas in the minds of the people. In all agricultural colleges the science of economics and of politics is receiving more and more attention.

A National Reform Press has been organized, including about a thousand newspapers, pledged to support the demands of the farmers' movement. There are a few dailies, but the most are weeklies. The circulation of many of these newspapers is 10,000, some reach 50,000, one perhaps 100,000. These are scattered over the whole country, and their influence cannot but be great. Besides these reform papers there is the agricultural press, an instrument of educational force not only in matters relating to agriculture, but also in subjects of political and economic science.

The town meeting, the district school, the public library, the Chautauqua movement, the country church, each and all, do much for the education of the farmer, far more than is commonly imagined. Upon one point the farmers of to-day are fully agreed. They are one in demanding for themselves and for their children the best education the times can afford. They have successfully insisted that the town, the State and the nation shall unite in providing every facility for educating the farmer in everything pertaining to the science and art of agriculture and to the knowledge and practice of manhood. As a consequence we find in America a system of agricultural education approaching the best the world affords. The great drawback is that only a few comparatively as yet are pecuniarily able to take advantage of the facilities thus offered by the State.

III. The farmers' movement has thrown a great deal of light upon co-operation, both distributive and productive. The educational results of the past twenty-five years of experiment have been of great value. The nature of the problem, the conditions of success, the dangers and difficulties in the way, have been made clear and the preparatory work accomplished which will make co-operation in the future more common and profitable.

So far as distributive co-operation is concerned the farmers have learned that the essential element of success lies in large orders for

cash. As a result middlemen have not been driven out of business, but the farmers of the North have succeeded in escaping that thrall-dom to the storekeeper which has been so disastrous in the South. *

There are throughout the country many successful co-operative stores, which benefit not only their patrons, but also indirectly all consumers. But the more common form of co-operative buying is through a business agent, who receives the orders of many farmers in the district or State, and so furnishes them goods at the lowest whole-sale prices. In the business of insurance, co-operation among farmers has had good results; they report that hundreds of thousands of dollars have been saved in premiums on fire and life policies. Co-operation among milk-producers, fruit-growers and cattle-men, for the purpose of marketing their products, has proved very remunerative.

In productive co-operation many experiments have been made which have been only partially successful. Manufacturers who have charged exorbitant prices have been brought to terms, but the farmers have learned that they can rarely carry on the farm and the factory successfully at the same time. Nevertheless, in the production of butter and cheese, co-operation has proved eminently successful. As agricultural science introduces new methods and tends to make the farm a great factory, where raw material of the soil, properly treated with chemical fertilizers and manipulated by means of elaborate machinery, shall be transformed into the finished products for the market, the greater is the necessity and the profit of co-operation, and the more capable do farmers find themselves of working together.

IV. Organization, education, co-operation, have led the farmers' movement towards political action. For generations the farmer confined himself closely to agriculture and to participation in the affairs of the town meeting. In the meanwhile, the cities grew in number, in population, in wealth and in influence, until he found that the twenty to thirty per cent of the people who live in cities, largely recent importations from foreign countries, actually governed not only the municipalities, but also the States and the nation, leaving the votes of the other citizens scattering and devoid of power. In order to protect their interests the farmers made use of the right of petition. They elected lawyers and other professional men to represent them and their interests in Legislature and Congress. They appealed to their party leaders. They sought to interest the press in their behalf. They brought their case before the courts. They presented themselves before the bar of public opinion. But they were disappointed. It made little difference whether they sent a farmer or a politician to

[*Cf. "The Peons of the South," by Geo. K. Holmes, in the *ANNALS* for September, 1893. The Editors.]

the Legislature. If the farmer went to the capital fresh from the plow, among a crowd of lobbyists, he was as clay in the hands of the potter. If his constituents kept him there year after year, until he learned the ways of legislation, then he ceased to be a farmer and became a member of some other class, perhaps a stockholder in a great railroad, or manufacturing corporation, with interests in common with the opponents of agricultural classes.

But from repeated failures and many disappointments the farmers are at length learning how to take care of themselves. They have become convinced that political action on their part is essential to their well being, that they must sustain their own interests, for others will not consider them. In their various subordinate organizations they discuss the situation. Their best representatives then bring the matter before their district, State and national bodies, where the whole subject is again debated. In this way they come to a decision as to what is practicable. They then formulate their demands, which they lay before the proper authorities in the town, the State or the nation, or in the caucus, or convention. They press and enforce their demands patiently and persistently, meeting all attacks bravely. They fight for their rights from their own point of view, believing that the free and fair contest of opposing interests will be the best for the whole people. If their interests are not presented as forcibly as those of other classes the result will be not only disastrous to them, but will also seriously endanger the public good. In the furtherance of these ends they have learned to trust no man implicitly, but to hold every man whom they choose to represent them responsible to them for his action.

The farmers have learned something of the methods of legislation. Hence when a hearing is given by a legislative committee, the farmers are on hand with their best speakers. When a bill is pending in which they are interested, letters, telegrams and petitions from all parts of the State come pouring in, urging legislators to do their duty. At State capitals, as well as at Washington, the farmers have their standing committees always on hand to watch legislation and see that their interests do not suffer. There are, however, so many ways of influencing legislation and the power of capital is so well-nigh irresistible, that the farmers have been beaten time and again and seen their cherished and just demands ignored. But their persistence has taught them and they are coming better to understand the science and practice of politics. Their organizations have been nominally, and to a large extent, really non-partisan, but from experience they have learned that votes in caucus and convention, as well as at the polls, are the real sources of power. Of these votes they still possess in

many States a majority, and throughout the nation a large minority. United with other laboring men, their votes would constitute a clear majority over all others. They now realize that their votes are their own, to be used for the realization of their demands. During the last few years they have been experimenting with the ballot and some surprising results have followed. The movement within the old party lines has been strong, leading to notable results, but it has not been confined to these. The farmers have found that both of the leading parties have for so long a time been dependent upon other elements than the farmer's vote for success, that it is difficult to transform them at once into humble servants of the agriculturist.

During the year of the presidential election many of the farmers seemed inclined to support a distinctive People's party, not really expecting to elect a president, but hoping to learn something, attract national attention to their demands and cast a vote sufficiently large to give them a basis for future action, either as the people's party destined to supplant the old parties, or else as a body of producers allied with the artisans, whose real interests shall be made a serious object by one or the other of existing parties. The results show the measure of their success. Out of a total vote of 12,154,542, the People's party cast 1,122,045 ballots. Their candidates received votes in every State of the Union. They carried Colorado, Idaho, Kansas and Nevada by majorities, and North Dakota and Oregon by pluralities, which gave twenty-two votes in the electoral college, being the first time since 1856 that a third party has secured an electoral vote. Investigation shows that this vote was almost entirely from the rural districts of the South and West. The People's party succeeded in increasing their representatives in the House from three to twelve. In the Senate they have several senators. In four States they elected their candidate for governor. Considering the difficulties against which this new party was obliged to contend, the success gained was indeed remarkable.

The radical demands of the farmers, as set forth in the platform of the People's party, are socialistic and are not likely soon to be formally ratified by the public opinion of the nation. But the People's party and its platform are only an incident in the greater movement of the farmers of America. It is an experiment being tried by the radicals among the agrarian leaders, but which has not yet received the endorsement of the great mass of the farmers. A great political party is not the growth of a day. Whenever the farmers of the United States shall as a unit demand of either of the old parties a certain line of policy and prove it to be practicable and just, one or the other of these parties will surely submit to their will. Class legislation in

behalf of the farmers may in some cases be secured, but the probabilities are that the final results will nevertheless be good. By pushing the system of class legislation to its logical outcome, the *reductio ad absurdum* will be apparent and a reaction must set in.

Farmers have suffered in the past because of their neglect to compete earnestly for their own interests, but now the signs of the times indicate that in all parts of our country they have at last aroused themselves and have begun a movement, the outcome of which will be to secure for them their full share of the products of the national industry and of the advantages of modern civilization.

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THE GRANGE AND THE CO-OPERATIVE ENTERPRISES IN NEW ENGLAND.

In this age of organization there is scarcely a branch of industry not organized in some way for the promotion of its interests. The first strong organization which sought to combine the farmers for common protection, encouragement and enlightenment, was the National Grange of the Patrons of Husbandry, founded in Washington, D. C., Dec. 4, 1867. A National Grange with constitution and ritual was established, then Subordinate Granges. Fifteen Subordinate Granges might themselves organize a State Grange. All were obligated to strict obedience and fealty to the National Grange. In spite of some opposition to it, in this "monarchial" feature of the organization probably lies the secret of the success which has tided the Order over many difficulties.

The Grange owes its origin to Mr. O. H. Kelley, a "plain practical farmer," a clerk in the Agricultural Department at Washington. After the war, President Johnson selected Mr. Kelley to investigate the conditions and needs of the farmers in the South. He returned full of the idea that in order to better their condition, organization must be effected. On consultation with friends interested in the farmer's welfare, the National Grange of Patrons of Husbandry was conceived by Mr. Kelley and six associates. Women were admitted to an equality in membership, thus adding that distinctive feature without which it is claimed the Grange would not be in existence to-day.

The Declaration of Purposes is a broad and worthy one, aspiring to promote all that is best in the mental, moral, social and spiritual development, as well as to advance the material interests of the patrons and more broadly to increase the welfare of all society. Any